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THE SUNDAY NEWSPAPER.

BY H. K. CARROLL, LL.D.

IS the Sunday newspaper helpful or harmful?

It is conceded by all Sabbatarians that works of necessity as well as works of charity are exceptions to the general obligation imposed by the divine law of the Sabbath. Both exceptions are broad enough in character to be made to cover a multitude of sins against the Sabbath.

What are works of necessity?

The saving of life, the relief of distress, the protection of imperiled property are, we are told, works of necessity. But our practice is much broader than our creed seems to allow. What our forefathers regarded as luxuries, or at least conveniences, we are apt to claim as necessities. The running of trains,

of street cars, of ferry-boats, the dispatch of mails, the opening of butcher shops and bakeries, and a hundred other activities which half a century ago would have been denounced as sins against the Sabbath, are now not only tolerated, but defended as lawful forms of Sunday business. I say nothing of the saloon traffic, for that is the one branch of trade which resists all restriction, legal or moral.

The interpretation of the law of charity is equally inclusive. Starting with our Saviour's statement that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day," the Liberalist insists that whatever adds to the comfort, whatever increases the luxuries and pleasures of mankind, is as much within this rule as is the saving of life, the relief of distress, and the giving of instruction in morals and theology. It is therefore right to open museums and libraries on Sunday; to give operatic and theatric entertainments; for all these things are designed, in the opinion of the Liberalist, to elevate man, to make him wiser and better.

Now it is obvious, it seems to me, that if we allow the Liberalist interpretation to be the correct one, these so-called works of necessity and charity will make our Sundays what our Mondays and our Tuesdays and our other week days are—days completely secularized. The pendulum has already swung far from the Puritan extreme; do we want to have it go to the Parisian extreme and stop? If there be no logical stopping place between these two points, would we not rather go back to the Puritan Sabbath than go on to the Parisian Sunday? And is it not about time to ask ourselves, as members of the Church of Christ, whether we are not strengthening the tendencies to secularity by conforming in practice to the Liberalist idea of Sunday while in theory opposing it?

There is a good deal, we are reminded, concerning the Sabbath which is debatable, and it is always difficult to draw lines through debatable grounds and say: "On this side all is right; on that side all is wrong." We speak of a north and a south in this country;

but where is the dividing line on the one side of which all is Northern territory, and on the other side all is Southern? The line must necessarily be an arbitrary one if drawn at all, since no sufficient reason could be given for not drawing it ten feet, fifty feet, or a hundred feet further north or further south than any proposed line where there is no natural boundary. Logic may, and often does, so confuse the boundary lines in morals that men find it difficult to decide whether some things are in moral or immoral territory. This form of reasoning we may call parallel reasoning.

By the process of parallel reasoning some convince themselves that the Sunday newspaper is a necessary and beneficent institution. The newspaper, they say—and this is only one of many such arguments—is a great educator. Civilization would not be what it is without it. It gives the daily history of all nations, and makes men better as well as more intelligent. It exposes and denounces wrong-doing, and preaches honesty, industry, morality, and

sobriety as faithfully as the pulpit. The service done for man by the newspaper in this way is of inestimable value. If this service is good on Saturday, and Monday, and other days of the week, why is it not equally good on Sunday? Now, if this reasoning be valid reasoning, it applies with equal force to all honorable activities. The work of the mason, carpenter, farmer, tailor, is of the utmost importance to mankind, and is to be encouraged and increased as much as possible. It is good six days of the week, we say, but not seven. We grant all that is claimed for the daily newspaper as an educator. We will admit that it is a great help to the Church in some respects, but we hold that the Sunday newspaper answers to no real necessity, and does more harm than good.

Let us remember, in the first place, that the Sunday edition of a daily newspaper is not a benevolent or philanthropic enterprise. It is a business affair, pure and simple. There is money in it, and money is the motive of the publisher, and he will publish for business

reasons the *kind of a newspaper his Sunday patrons want.*

In the second place, there is no real necessity for a Sunday newspaper. Not once a year is there news of such importance that the public should have it on Sunday. During the war of the rebellion, when the fate of armies and the future of the nation hung in the balance, and men waited in breathless suspense the news of victory or defeat, a special Sunday edition or bulletin might have been defensible. But we are not under stress of war, or calamity, or commercial necessity, and have not been for many years. It can, therefore, be no real deprivation, except to those who make Sunday a day of idle amusement, to wait till Monday for the news of Saturday and Sunday.

We are told that the Sunday newspaper, which is an innovation, has come to stay, and that we should make the best of it. It has probably come to stay, and we must make the best of it; not, however, by patronizing it. We ought not patronize it for several reasons:

1. Its influence is wholly secular. It makes no pretense of being religious in character. I examined some time ago the New York Sunday papers and classified their contents, and I found in them from half a column to two columns of what might be called religious matter, and this was merely incidental. Long special accounts of horse-races, with quotations of the betting; columns of base-ball news; pages, in the aggregate, of crimes, court news, and scandals were given place, with much other matter unfit to be read at any time. Cable and general news dispatches were longer and more numerous than on any other day of the week, and the size of the issue was enormously increased—doubled, tripled, quadrupled. What chance is there for the Sunday morning sermon to make its way into a mind filled with from sixty to a hundred columns or more of American, European, and Asiatic politics, and the financial and commercial news of the world, spiced with details of murders, divorces, adulteries, and the like? How is such a mind to join devoutly in worship,

or to dwell in reverent meditation upon the teachings of God's word? How hardly shall the spiritual life escape being changed into an empty formality under such conditions! The commercial spirit is the ruling spirit of the age. It is in the Church, sapping its spiritual vigor. Shall we remove all resistance to it by breaking down the walls of the Sabbath, and allowing the secularities of the week to flow uninterruptedly through the whole of the seven days? If not, let us not support the Sunday newspaper.

2. Sooner or later the Sunday newspaper will undermine the church-going habit. Sunday is a leisurely day. Most families rise a little later on that morning, and when they get up from breakfast they have but little more time than is necessary to prepare for church. But here comes the Sunday newspaper, increased for this day to twice, thrice, or even four or five times its usual size, and filled with an infinite variety of matter, designed to interest and attract every body that cares to be amused. To take it up is to be-

come, in most cases, so absorbed in it that the hour of church service comes before the reading is finished; and how easy it is to summon little excuses for the resolve not to go to church this morning! Nothing is more natural than that the Sunday newspaper should thus change the inclination of church-going people. An hour's reading in the Bible, or some other religious book, has quite the opposite effect. One of the comic papers gave a cartoon recently, representing the head of the family just taking up the first supplement of the multitudinous morning sheet as his wife, dressed for church, appears to remind him that the church hour has arrived. He dismisses her with the remark that he cannot go to-day; he hasn't finished his paper. It is a very ordinary picture, but it contains a very striking lesson. It would almost seem that the publishers of Sunday papers are deliberately trying to furnish a counter attraction to church-going people. Probably four or five times as much money is expended on the Sunday issue as any single

week-day issue costs. And it is sought to compel people to buy it, not only by making it full and attractive, but by making the Monday issue as bare and worthless as possible.

3. The Sunday newspaper, on the average, is of distinctly lower tone than the week-day issue. There are few week-day issues which are entirely free from objectionable matter; but scandals and crimes which may be allowed to pass with a mere mention six days in the week will appear on Sunday at length, with no detail or embellishment necessary to completeness and attractiveness lacking. Now, while it is not true that whatever is right and proper on a week-day is right and proper on Sunday, it is true that whatever is improper on a week-day is improper on Sunday. And if we do well to guard our families against what is unwholesome in the week-day papers, we shall do better to keep the Sunday papers out of our homes altogether.

4. The Sunday newspaper is made to be sold and read on Sunday. Those given to parallel reasoning contend that newsgatherers,

editors, and compositors do more work on Sunday for the Monday issue than for the Sunday issue. Therefore those who buy and read a Monday paper should not object to a Sunday paper. There seems to be great force in this argument. But its weakness is the weakness incidental to parallel reasoning. The parallel is not a perfect parallel. The Sunday paper has objectionable features, as we have already seen, that the week-day paper has not; but above and beyond this is the fact that the enormous Sunday edition is sold and circulated on that day. All the traffic, and it is no light one, is conducted on the Lord's day. Thousands of men and boys are compelled to spend most of the forenoon in attendance at their news-stands or in the streets, calling their papers and thrusting them before every passer-by, or delivering them at houses. Special trains are chartered to carry the city papers far into the country, and we are told in the Monday issues how fast the train ran, and what paper was first distributed at various points along the route.

All this is unseemly and unnecessary. Christ said the Sabbath was made for man; but the Sunday newspapers seem to hold that it was no more made for man than any other day. They seem to be in conspiracy to crowd as much business, bustle, and secularity into it as possible.

The legal aspects of the issue and sale of Sunday newspapers I will not now discuss. The Church must not depend on the statute-book for right Sabbath observance. It must give sound teaching on the subject, and exhort its members to hallow the day as God himself has hallowed it, by putting aside their business, by worshiping in the House of God with clear and undistracted minds, and by avoiding all those aids to secularity the chief of which is the Sunday newspaper.

HUNT & EATON, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York.

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